Quality Improvement
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Quality Improvement

Introduction

"Public programs of every stripe and size across the nation are shifting from seeing themselves as accountable for creating and carrying out activities, to being accountable for achieving results – meeting goals, effecting change, and improving the quality of their services. Such transformation can be exciting: changing the way you work, the way you assess your work, and the way you inform others of your progress. And it can be difficult: redefining roles and responsibilities, creating new collaborations, overcoming resistance to change." (*Guidebook for Performance Measurement*)

"Performance management is the strategic use of performance standards, measures, progress reports, and ongoing quality improvement efforts to ensure an agency achieves desired results. In the case of public health, the ultimate purpose of these efforts is to improve the public's health. While the concepts of quality improvement, accountability, and performance are hardly new, they are increasingly energizing public health agencies around the country to streamline activities and make sure their work and investments pay off. By defining results and showing accountability, performance management efforts also have helped many public health agencies communicate what they accomplish to policy makers, employees, and the public." *(From Silos to Systems: Using Performance Management to Improve the Public's Health)*

The purpose of this section of the Orientation is 1) to provide information about quality improvement as it is defined and used within a public health framework; 2) to show the relationship of this framework to national and state initiatives to improve public health; 3) to discuss the roles of local public health officials related to performance management and quality improvement; and 4) to highlight some of the tools and resources that can be used by public health leaders at the local level for improvement efforts.

Defining Key Concepts and a Framework for Quality Improvement in Public Health

Sometimes the terms "quality improvement" and "performance improvement" are used interchangeably. Regardless of which term is used, the underlying concept is a systematic approach and on-going commitment to improvement. This concept is fundamental to public health practice; and various national and state initiatives and activities have been undertaken to improve the performance of public health programs, public health agencies, and the public health system.

The Turning Point Performance Management Collaborative

A framework developed by the Turning Point Performance Management Collaborative (PMC) incorporates quality improvement as one of the four components of a performance management system. The following paragraphs from the PMC website describe this framework.

- **Definition of Performance Management**
  Performance management is the practice of actively using performance data to improve the public's health. This practice involves strategic use of performance measures and standards to establish performance targets and goals, to prioritize and allocate resources, to inform managers about needed adjustments or changes in policy or program directions to meet goals, to frame reports on the success in meeting performance goals, and to improve the quality of public health practice.

- **Components of Performance Management**
  Performance Management components include:

  1. Performance Standards - establishment of organizational or system performance standards, targets and goals and relevant indicators to improve public health practice,
  2. Performance Measures - application and use of performance indicators and measures,
  3. Reporting of Progress - documentation and reporting of progress in meeting standards and targets and sharing of such information through feedback, and
  4. Quality Improvement - establishment of a program or process to manage change and achieve quality improvement in public health policies, programs or infrastructure based on performance standards, measurements and reports.

- **Definition of a Performance Management System**
  A performance management system is the continuous use of all the above practices so that they are integrated into the organization's core operations. Performance management can be carried out at multiple levels, including the program, organization, community, and state levels.

  - ✓ Additional information about the Turning Point Performance Measurement Collaborative is available online at
    http://www.turningpointprogram.org/Pages/perfmgt.html

The PMC website also includes links to excellent resources for performance improvement. Some of these are listed in the Learning Resource Toolkit.

Relating the Framework to National and State Public Health Initiatives

National Level Activities and Resources
Many activities and resources developed at the national level are intended to improve performance of public health agencies and the public health system. Only a few are highlighted here and in the Learning Resource Toolkit.

- **The National Public Health Performance Standards Program**
  The National Public Health Performance Standards Program, a collaborative effort of CDC and six national public health organizations established performance standards for public health practice. The standards are designed around the ten Essential Public Health Services. Three sets of standards and assessment instruments were developed for state public health systems: local public health systems and local governing bodies. States and localities use the performance standards to assess current performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, and implement plans for improvement.

✓ Information about the National Public Health Performance Standards Program is available online at http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/nphpsp/index.asp

- *The Performance Improvement Resource Guide for Local Public Health Systems*
  As part of the National Public Health Performance Standards Program, a toolkit was developed to help local agencies implement plans for improvement. *The Performance Improvement Resource Guide for Local Public Health Systems* was developed by the Public Health Foundation to help local public health systems that have completed the National Public Health Performance Standards Program (NPHPSP), and seek to use the results to improve their system's performance. The Guide identifies resources and tools for topics such as:
  - Assessing community health service needs
  - Assessing community satisfaction with population-based services
  - Identifying gaps in services
  - Evaluating public health programs
  - Using evaluation findings to modify plans
  - Encouraging innovative ways to solve community health problems
  - Researching and monitoring best practice information

  Since these topics are relevant for most local public health agencies, and the guide organizes performance improvement tools and resources around each of the 10 Essential Public Health Services, local agencies that have not conducted the NPHPSP can also use the resources in this guide to improve their performance.

  ✓ *The Performance Improvement Resource Guide for Local Public Health Systems* is available online at http://www.phf.org/PerformanceTools/NPHPSP_Local_PI.htm

Washington State
Through the Public Health Improvement Partnership, Washington State has developed a system that aligns with the components of a performance management system as described by the Turning Point Collaborative.

1. <u>Performance Standards and Performance Measures</u>: The *Standards for Public Health in Washington State* include standards and measures for the governmental public health system at the state and local levels.
2. <u>Reporting of Progress</u>: A baseline assessment of the standards was performed, and the results were documented and reported. In addition, a self-assessment tool was created for state and local agencies to use to measure performance, and the results of the self-assessment are also reported.
3. <u>Quality Improvement</u>: The Exemplary Practices Compendium, an electronic collection of exemplary practices was created to help state and local public health agencies improve performance and meet the standards. In addition, the self –assessment queries agencies about training and resources needed to improve performance, and this information will be used for planning and workforce development efforts.

Another effort currently underway is the development of the "Administrative Capacities" to Support the Public Health Standards. These are intended to describe administrative capability and infrastructure needed for public health agencies to carry out their mission. Once tested, these can be included in future assessments of the public health system and will serve as a

guide for state and local agencies working to develop and improve their administrative capacity and level of performance.

✓ *The Standards for Public Health in Washington State* are available to view or download at http://www.doh.wa.gov/standards/default.htm

✓ *The Baseline Evaluation Report* that document results of the first baseline evaluation of Washington State local health jurisdictions and Department of Health programs against the Standards for Public Health in Washington State is available at http://www.doh.wa.gov/PHIP/Standards/Reports.htm

✓ *Self-Assessment Reports* that summarize results of the self assessment for
- Local health departments: http://www.doh.wa.gov/PHIP/documents/Standards/localhealthtesuts.pdf
- State Health Department: http://www.doh.wa.gov/PHIP/documents/Standards/donresults-summaryreport.pdf

✓ The Exemplary Practices Electronic compendium is available online at http://www.doh.wa.gov/PHIP/Standards/BestPractices/StandardsExemplaryPractices.htm

Quality Improvement Principles and Processes

There are many approaches to quality improvement, and many specific techniques, such as:
- Cause and effect diagrams
- Deming's 14 points
- Flowcharting
- Pareto analysis
- PDCA cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act)

The PDCA Cycle, or the "Shewart Cycle", is often used to coordinate continuous improvement efforts. It both emphasizes and demonstrates that improvement programs must start with careful planning, must result in effective action, and must move on again to careful planning in a continuous cycle.

The Learning Resource Toolkit includes resources for more information about the PDCA cycle and other quality improvement tools. The literature and Internet offer additional resources and tools for quality improvement.

Applying the Concepts and Integrating Lessons Learned with Practice

Lessons Learned
Local public health officials, in their roles as administrators, managers, and leaders, can use lessons learned by the Performance Management Collaborative (PMC) during its study of ways to improve public health agency performance and create healthier communities. These lessons include:
1) Performance management achieves the best results as an ongoing and system-wide practice, integrated into all routine public health processes and programs,

2) Agencies can work more effectively by aligning performance measures, activities, and spending with public health priorities.

3) Successful public health agencies need trained staff and dedicated resources, supported by a culture of performance management.

4) *New or adapted information and management systems are essential to manage performance, especially across programs.* *(Guidebook for Performance Measurement)*

Roles for Local Public Health Officials

From these lessons, important roles for local public health officials in performance management and quality improvement can be identified. Among these are:

- Nurturing an organizational culture and environment that emphasizes quality and performance throughout the agency;

- Assuring that supervisors and managers are trained in evaluating performance of staff, programs and systems;

- Assuring that data systems are providing information necessary to monitor quality and performance in the agency;

- Assigning personnel and financial resources to performance management functions;

- Creating structures and processes for actively managing performance in all areas (operational, service delivery, management practices, etc.); and

- Engaging agency employees and community partners and stakeholders in quality improvement efforts and communicating the results of those efforts